DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 977 UD 025 812

AUTHOR Vuong, Joseph Trung
TITLE Vietnamese Cross-Cultural Adjustment.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Adjustment (to Environment); Comparative Analysis; Counseling Objectives; Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Differences; *Immigrants; Migrants; Refugees; Social Integration; *Student Adjustment; *Vietnamese People
IDENTIFIERS Vietnam

ABSTRACT

This report provides information that will help Americans deal with or counsel Vietnamese refugees. The following topics are covered: (1) history and geography of Vietnam; (2) culture of Vietnam; (3) differences between American and Vietnamese culture; (4) counseling recommendations; (5) differences between American and Vietnamese students; and (6) tips that can help Vietnamese adjust to American culture. The report emphasizes the difficulties Vietnamese face in joining a culture that demands personal initiative and assertiveness, traits that are considered undesirable in Vietnamese culture. (VM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

10/6/87

VIETNAMESE CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

ED286977

1. - History and Geographhy

Vietnam occupies the whole 1200 to 1400 miles of coastline from the Chinese border on the north to the Gulf of Siam in the south. The total land area is 127,000 square miles of beautiful mountainous plains, and small desserts. It is about the size of the State of New Mexico. Vietnam is a predominantly agricultural country, with an estimated 80% of the population as farmers.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Joseph Trung Vuong
Jefferson Parish Public School System
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Vietnamese history can be divided into 6 main periods:

2879 B. C. to 111 B. C.	- Establishment of a nation.
111 B. C. to 938 A. D.	- Chinese domination
938 A. D. to 1883	- Independence.
1883 to 1954	- French domination.
1954 to 1975	- Conflict between North and South.
1975 to today	- Communist domination.

2. - Culture

Family: The family is the basis of the social identity of the individual, and the structure is paternal. A man looks to his family first for help and counsel in times of personal crisis. A married woman joins the family of her husband. Filial piety is considered one of the most important duties of a person. The traditional household consists of three generations.

Language: The Vietnamese language is basically monosyllabic, and it has six tones, which give it a sing-song effect. The three main dialects correspond to the geographic regions of the north, central and south.

Names: Vietnamese names are written in reverse order of American names: family, middle, and first name. There are about 300 family names, and the "Nguyen" is used by at least half of the population. The Vietnamese woman

UD025812

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

usually keeps her maiden name upon marriage. The middle name may indicate the sex of a person (Van for male, Thi for female).

Religion: The majority of the population are Buddhists, but they may also be Confucianists and Taoists. The Taoist concept of harmony, the Confucian ethical and social principles and the Buddhist theory of reincarnation and act of retribution have blended together to a form of philosophy and religion.

Holidays and Celebrations: Tet or Lunar New Year is the most important feast of the year, which generally occurs in February. It is a family reunion, a spring festival and a national holiday. Since Vietnamese do not celebrate each individual's birthday, Tet is also everyone's birthday. This is also a time to pay homage to ancestors.

Education: Education has always been extremely important in Vietnamese society, and educated people have traditionally held an honored place. Teachers are ranked second after the King.

3. - Cross-Cultural Adjustment

The adjustment of Vietnamese refugees is dependent on both the degree of social cohersiveness within their own communities, and their relationship with the American host community.

Vietnamese children mostly have the acculturation motivation, self-image and feeling of alienation transmitted to them by their parents. In Vietnam, the family rather than the individual, is the basic unit of society, and harmony in personal relationships is valued more than personal achievement and competitiveness, which are deemed selfish. Intelligence, scholarship, and by extension, wisdom are valued more than physical prowess or bravery for its own sake. Physical beauty and grace are important attributes for both men and women, but virtue is praised most highly.

Filial devotion, brotherly love, and conjugal fidelity are highly valued.

Marriage was formerly arranged by the family.

The Vietnamese possess an inwardness, a well-developed ability to keep their true feelings hidden. Desires are expressed by indirection, by hinting and "talking around" the subject. American straightforwardness is considered at best impolite, if not brutal. In Vietnam one does not come directly to the point. To do so is, for an American, a mark of honesty and forthrightness while a Vietnamese sees it as a lack of intelligence or courtesy.

4. - Counseling Recommendation

A goal of counseling is to assist recipients in adjusting to or otherwise negotiating various environments. We suggest ways for counselors to build positive relationships -- based on understanding of psychological differences and war-related traumas -- to help Vietnamese students and their families to adjust to American environments. By far the most important ingredient in the counseling relationship is rapport or mutual trust.

Vietnamese culture is highly structured with definite roles ascribes; the school is part of the confucian authority hierarchy, and officials including counselors, are expected to be authoritative and directive. Vietnamese clients may perceive counselors who are not authoritative as unconcerned. American psychotherapeutic theories stress the client's self-disclosure, active participation, openness, decision-making and growth in independence. These methods are not necessary appropriate goals in counseling Vietnamese students. Most therapists would agree that in a counseling interview, frank discussion of feelings, problems, and concerns is desirable. This can be inhibited by two Vietnamese traits: (1) unwillingness to disclose problems and feelings, and (2) extreme humility. Vietnamese students find it difficult to discuss problems and reveal emotions. Personal matters that embarrass, cause hurt or stress are not usually discussed with anyone except with family and very close friends.

5. - Differences Between American and Vietnamese Students

1) American students like to actively produce and learn by doing, while the Vietnamese students feel harmony when they are still.

2) American students love to argue, and refine thought and opinions because that's how people grow and change. They love to talk about their differences. They believe in compromise and collaboration. They negotiate almost everything. Vietnamese students don't seem to communicate with each other. When they disagree with someone, they never say it out. They view silence as polite. Nobody knows what they really think or feel. They usually smile and then withdraw.

3) American parents like their children to be active and full of life. They teach them very early to depend on themselves and express their opinions to them. The Vietnamese children are quiet and well behaved. Their parents teach them to obey.

4) American children are expected to learn to earn their own way, and not rely on their parents' will. The Vietnamese children are taught to live with and rely on their parents. They must ask their parents almost everything before they act.

It is important to help the Vietnamese students to understand that:

1. This life has been created particularly for each individual. It is not duplicated from anybody's life. Life is unique. He/she is responsible for his/her own life.

2. He/she must hold his/her life in his/her own hands. People may help, but may not control or decide what he/she has to do. He/she is the boss of his/her own life.

3. He/she should have confidence in himself/herself. Confidence is the key which leads to success.

4. He/she should relate and communicate with others in constructive ways.

5. He/she should deal with changes in himself/herself, others, and his/her world on the basis of evaluation and critical thinking, as opposed to blindly accepting or rejecting traditional or non-traditional viewpoints or ideas.

6. He/she should become independent, be able to make decisions, and stand on one's own feet in circumstances where independent decision-making involves responsibility to self and others, is based upon evaluation, and does not deny the right of others.

6. - How to adjust the cultural differences

People are born with their own emotional instincts and are taught to be logical in the way in which we deal with others. Karl Menniger estimates that ninety percent of human actions are emotional and ten percent intellectual. He concludes, therefore, that people are mostly feelings. We make decisions emotionally, not intellectually. There is nothing wrong in expressing feelings. Anger is a natural, normal emotion. Vietnamese people do not have to say "yes" all the times. They must say "no" because there is nothing wrong in expressing their feelings. There is no reason to feel guilty because of anger. Vietnamese people must learn to accept anger as an honest emotion, a natural part of life. The more they fear rejection, criticism, the more they are dependent on others, the more they have little confidence in themselves.

Americans do not like passive people. They describe passiveness is a personal problem of serious proportions. They perceive passive people not being sincere. Passive people often lack the ability to share their true selves with someone else and are less effective in shaping their own world because they hide themselves from themselves and from others.

Vietnamese people must know that to be real is to be direct and honest. They must know who they are and what they are. They must act assertively. The assertive person stands up for his or her rights while taking the rights

of others into consideration.

Americans are not mind readers. Vietnamese must ask for what they want. They should know that they can not make other people happy by pleasing them. Others make themselves happy, just as they make themselves happy. Get ready for disapproval and accept that it will happen. People can never escape disapproval.

Vietnamese people must adopt the attitude that they will do the best they can; and if someone does not like it, that's their problem. No one can satisy everyone. No one can be expected to be all things to all people.

There are great rewards in being our own person and living our life according to our own standards.

Joseph Trung Vuong
Bilingual Counselor
Jefferson Parish School Board